

## TELLING IT LIKE IT IS: 4<sup>TH</sup> SUNDAY OF LENT B

Paul O'Reilly, a Jesuit priest in England, recalls that when he was a seminarian on pastoral placement in a parish he was given a job called 'Drinkers' Duty'. Every morning about 8 o'clock, 20 to 30 men would come to the church to tell Paul how much alcohol they had drunk the previous day. Paul's job was not to say 'that's good' or 'that's bad' but simply to write it down for the record. All sorts of men would turn up from poor hopeless drug addicts to rich and successful businessmen. Sometimes they would come very proudly and say 'None! And that's just two pints for the whole week.' At other times one or more would come up looking very sheepish and ashamed and say 'Er ... eight cans, Brother!'

Nobody made them do this. They wanted to do it. They were all men who knew they had a problem with alcohol. They also knew what Jesus tells us today that 'everybody who does wrong hates the light and avoids it, for fear their actions should be exposed; but those who live by the truth come out into the light, so that it may be plainly seen that what they do is done in God.'

So those problem drinkers needed a place and a person to go to each day where they could feel safe enough to be honest about their drinking, to tell it like it is.

That, of course, is the deal with the sacrament called 'Reconciliation' or 'Confession'. People who are not Catholics find it hard to understand. They ask, 'Why can't I just confess my sins to God? Why do I have to bother with a priest?'

The answer of course is that we can confess our sins to God. Nobody is stopping us. But we all know that we human beings are good at deceiving ourselves. It's not just alcoholics. We all need a safe place and a person we trust, in order to fess up to both the bad things we have done and the good things we have failed to do. We need that because as Catholic Christians we want to live by the Truth, the Truth that sets us free, the Truth that comes to us in the words of Jesus saying through our priest 'I absolve you from your sins', which is to say 'I am setting you free'.

Someone has remarked wisely that hearing those words is like being 'hugged by God'! So, let's make more use of this gift from Jesus Christ that has come to us through his Church, this very healing practice!

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